

Prescribed Fire: Benefits for wildlife

Using fire to provide long-term,
ecosystem benefits...



Short term losses versus long term gains



Game versus non-game...need to shift focus to ecosystems



Many plant/animal communities evolved with fire...

- A naturally occurring habitat disturbance
- Frequency depended on weather patterns, soils, vegetative structure, etc.
- Some habitats are fire dependent, some fire adapted
- Used by Indians for many purposes
- Other things like grazing animals interacted with fire effects to produce highly diverse, robust ecosystems

Bison...Mother Nature's disk...



Picture 25,000 buffalo grazing...





General benefits to wildlife are through plant species and plant structure...

- Tends to reduce woody stems and increase herbaceous plants
- Scarifies seeds and stimulates germination
- Has some fertilization effects
- Improves nutritional value of some plants
- Increases palatability of herbaceous vegetation
- Removes duff layer – exposes some bare soil
- Improves plant structure – keeps food and cover down where it is needed

Reducing woody stems...why is this good?



Scarifying seeds and encouraging herbaceous growth...



Removes duff layer and exposes some bare ground...



Habitat structure...remember Jurassic Park...???

- Need openings and bare ground at ground level...
- But need some cover overhead...
- Things like ragweed, partridge pea, pokeweed, beggar weed – they not only produce an abundance of seeds for fall and winter food, they provide the proper structure
- If you think about the size of organisms using these habitats – it compares in scale to humans walking through an open understory oak woodland

Get down to chick's eye view...



And what do good, succulent,
herbaceous plants attract...??



But not all species need exactly the same thing...





Where fire can be effectively applied for wildlife

- Open fields / old fields for maintenance
- In field situations to aid in fescue / exotic grass control (increases herbicide effectiveness and seeding)
- Timber site preparation burning
- Thinned pine stands (long-leaf, even sooner)
- Thinned hardwood stands, particularly white oaks
- Shelterwood harvest areas















Burn timing...case by case, based on goals...

- With all this there is the “cookbook”, then there is reality, so... GO LOOK AT IT...then decide...
- Basically – cool season or winter burns, safest, have some effects, reduces fuel loads and prepares for growing season fire
- Growing season fire (late March through late September)
 - More intense
 - Conditions more volatile
 - But best at controlling woody stems and stimulating herbaceous
 - Should not be done by inexperienced burners

Questions...??? Speak now or go burn
yourself up...

